

The People Behind The Toys

By ANNE ZUSY

A TOY inventor, a Polish émigré with a background in engineering, was given an assignment: play with ribbons, learn everything you can and try to come up with something new and great.

For two months, the inventor, an employee in the creative-development department of a Cleveland toy company, did little but fold, ravel, wind and curl ribbons. Several false starts later, he came up with an idea that led to Tuggabows, a yarn-haired doll new on the market last Christmas. Pull ribbons, and her hair changes shape and style.

The doll was among the 4,000 to 6,000 new toys that join the 150,000 or so already on the market each year. Just about all of them are formally introduced to the trade press and to store buyers at the American International Toy Fair.

The event, held annually in New York, will open Monday at the Toy Center, on Fifth Avenue at 23d Street; in showrooms nearby, and at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. More than 17,000 buyers are expected to attend, selecting items with which to stock shelves through Christmas.

Yet for the toy makers themselves, "Toy Fair is kind of the anticlimax," said Tom Schneider, a senior executive at Those Characters From Cleveland Inc., a design house that creates characters that become toys. Many inventors are already working on products for 1990.

The majority of toys start as the ideas of employees of 1,100 manufacturing companies. There are also about two dozen organizations around the country whose main business is to develop toys and sell the concepts to manufacturing companies.

Amateurs have difficulty finding homes for their toys, though some do make it — including the highly successful Xavier Roberts, a crafts artist who invented Cabbage Patch Kids dolls, 50.5 million of which have been sold since 1978, and Barbara L. Isenberg, founder and owner of North American Bear Inc., which produces the Very Important Bears line.

Because of the creativity, competition and money involved — the Toy Manufacturers of America, an industry trade group, estimates that Americans spent \$12.5 billion on toys in 1987 — toy makers are a secretive lot.

Fearful of helping the competition, no one will breathe a word about current projects. Some will not discuss how they came upon previous ideas or let their in-

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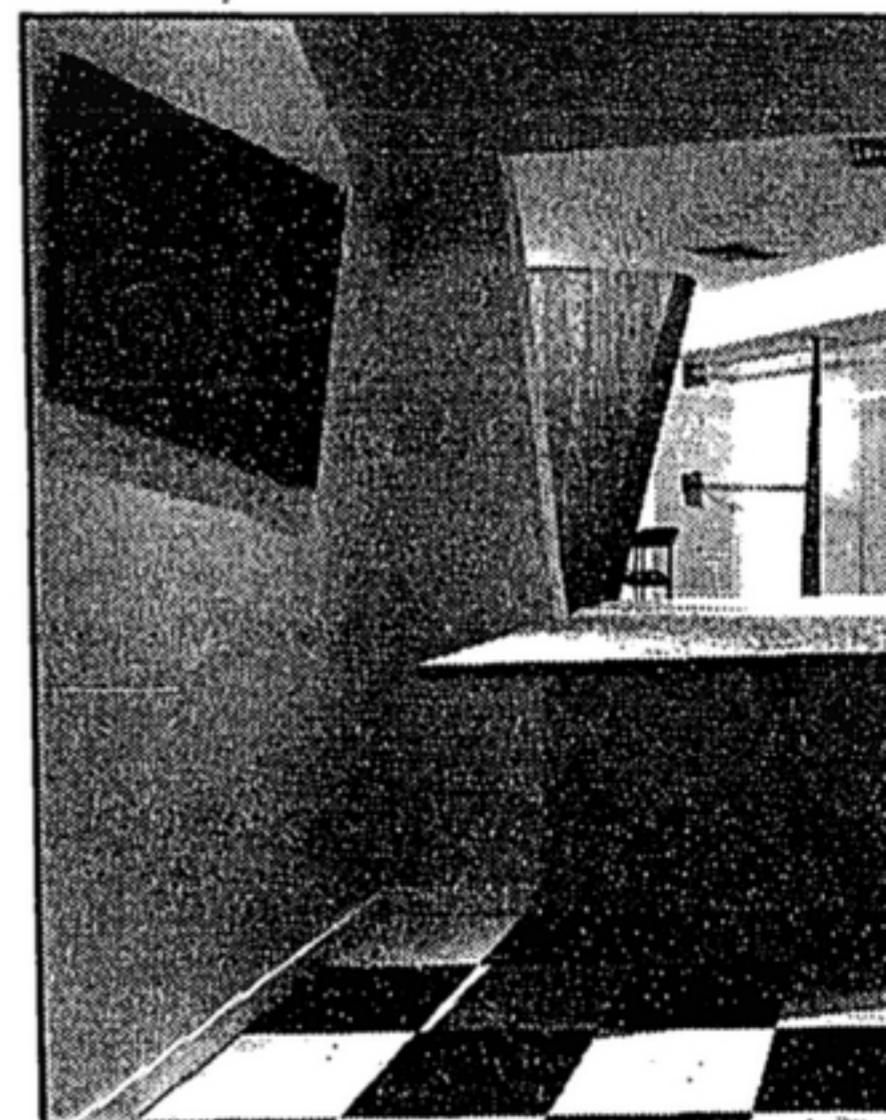
The Limit of A New School

By JOSEPH GIOVANNINI

SITTING at his drafting table wearing leopard spot shoes, jeans and a shaggy sweater, a 21-year-old student at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Santa Monica works on a model that looks like a sprawling house of cards. With leaning walls and inclined floors, the building seems about to collapse.

"I sort of know what I'm doing, but I don't," says the student, André Bilokur. "I want to do something I've never done before."

Like hundreds of other students in the United States, Canada and Europe, Mr. Bilokur is trying to understand new concepts now challenging the basic architecture. The ideas originated with a handful of avant-garde architects in Vienna, London, Milan, Paris, York, Chicago and Los Angeles.



Deconstructive architects slant walls and floors in a fashion showroom in Manhattan, designed by Daniel Libeskind.